

University of Dundee

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Donkers, Laura

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## The Monument Game

Laura Donkers University of Dundee

E: l.donkers@dundee.ac.uk

*Abstract:* The *Monument Game* is a deep map that investigates the bio-cultural heredity of the Outer Hebrides through the riddle of how a Monkey Puzzle tree came to be planted on a small island in Loch an Eilean, Askernish, South Uist during the time of the Clearances, and reveals the long term effects that still resonate in the land today.

Comprising a pack of 54-cards with a set of images, which present maps, tables, and botanical photographs of the plant species on the island recorded during a research trip in 2012: And the text 'Monument', which is a timely reflection on the need to cultivate our understanding of place.

'The little island garden with its collection of distorted and varied specimens reveals two perspectives of thought: on the one hand a reminder of colonial dominance and the havoc that created; and on the other hand the bountiful and forgiving lessons that nature teaches about adaptation, assimilation, diversity and symbiosis. Both ultimately present in the here and now.'

To play 'The Monument Game' participants are invited to engage in a workshop taking the form of a 'Whist Drive': 4 players per table. Each group receives a set of Monument Game playing cards and instructions on how to play the child's card game 'Go Fish'.

Video of the game on vimeo <https://vimeo.com/94789540>

## The Monument Game

Laura Donkers

### **Deep Mapping**

‘Deep Mapping’, as a process, depicts space, time, and place with the people, flora and fauna that exist within it, and tries to articulate an attitude and experience of Place identifying it as a complex convergence.

A *Deep Map* that is also a card game helps to narrate ties from one generation to the next by revealing the confluence of actions and evidence in an open, multi-layered and ever changing visual/verbal space.

Taking the Monument Game as an example, this presentation will begin by examining two views of landscape and contemporary association with it – from the historical fact of the Highland Clearances and an action that took place on a tiny piece of land, up to the present day. Here we will meet environmental artists, Phil Lydon and Suhee Kang, attempting to re-evaluate natural farming methods in East Asia and the United States at a time when the concept of living off the land and growing one’s food has become a novelty.

This presentation will then look at the process of playing the Monument Game as a contrivance to engage players directly with the text and images in a convivial, shared experience through the reading aloud of random, fragmented texts that reorder historical and contemporary events resulting in a deeper understanding of how to evaluate historical actions and their effects on contemporary life.

### **The Monument Game**

The Monument Game is a deep map and a tool for causing effect. It investigates the bio-cultural heritage of the Outer Hebrides through the riddle of how a Monkey

Puzzle<sup>1</sup> tree came to be planted on a small island in Loch an Eilean, Askernish, South Uist during the time of the Clearances, and the effects that still resonate in the land today.

Comprising a 54-card set of images and the text piece 'Monument', which takes its title from the description of the Monkey-Puzzle tree declared the natural monument of Chile<sup>2</sup> (1976) and also symbol of colonialism (author's declaration). This text explores how a Monkey-Puzzle tree, still growing successfully today, came to be planted on a tiny island in a small loch at Askernish, Isle of South Uist, at the time of forceful depopulation known as the Highland Clearances. I have not discovered any records to show that it was definitely planted around this time, however, it takes around 50 years to reach full height and given that it is clearly marked on a map from 1875<sup>3</sup>, along with the other trees also still growing there, I have concluded that it was well-grown at the time it was recorded.

The card images present maps, a botanical species index, and botanical photographs of the plant species recorded growing on the island during a research trip (2012).

For some time I had been intrigued by the large Monkey-Puzzle tree growing on a small island in the middle of a loch in South Uist. A tree I recognised from a suburban childhood. The Monkey Puzzle tree, or *Araucaria araucana*, is a large, slow growing evergreen tree originating from Chile. It likes fertile, moist but well-drained soil, in an open site with shelter from cold and drying winds. Yet it is growing in a bog on the west side of a watery landscape comprising lochs, hills, and peat lands, with a sandy coastal edge overlooking the Atlantic.

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<sup>1</sup> When *Araucaria araucana* was first becoming popular in Britain in the mid-1850s, aside from 'Chilean pine', there was no common name and very few people had ever laid eyes on such an unusual tree, so when the proud owner of one such specimen was showing it to some guests, he remarked 'it would puzzle even a monkey to climb that', and the name was born. [http://apps.kew.org/trees/?page\\_id=136](http://apps.kew.org/trees/?page_id=136) [online accessed 7.10.13]

<sup>2</sup> [In Chile] these trees have been heavily logged for over a century for their fine knot-free timber. In 1976 they were declared 'natural monuments' and their felling strictly prohibited. <http://www.edenproject.com/visit-us/whats-here/plant-a-z/monkey-puzzle> [accessed online 21.11.13]

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/record/nls/10110/ordnance-survey-25-inch-mile-inverness-hebrides-sheet-05510/os25inch> [accessed online 22.09.13] App. 3

## Memory, Identity and Landscape – Geographical Perspectives

5-7 May 2016, DCU, Dublin, Republic of Ireland

It is clear then, that someone purposefully planted this tree along with the other non-native species I found growing there during a study visit in 2012. Local rumor suggested that it was Lady Gordon Cathcart (1845-1942), a former landowner of South Uist Estate who was said to 'wander the isles with trees in her pocket, planting as she went'. However historical records<sup>4</sup> show that Lady Gordon Cathcart only ever visited the islands once in her lifetime. Irrespective of who was responsible, old maps reveal, that the Monkey-Puzzle has stood on this small island in Loch an Eilean since at least 1875. Yet *Araucaria araucana* had only been in Britain for 80 years at this point, introduced by the botanist, Archibald Menzies (1754- 1842) as a batch of five seedlings he had grown-on, when he had been served the ripe seed pods as a desert.<sup>5</sup>

The richness and variety contained on this small pocket of land bears testament to an earlier era of 'happy homesteads and waving cornfields'<sup>6</sup>; when the land was fully worked to support a thriving and large population of island dwellers before the clearing of the population lead to depleted fertility, variety, self-sufficiency and sustainability. The notoriety of the effects of the Highland Clearances<sup>7</sup> on the land and people of Scotland are well documented yet it remains astonishing to consider that at the very moment such mechanistic, cruel and ignorant actions were being carried out against the indigenous population the same 'sophisticated' minority oversaw the planting up of this island in a similarly colonialist act.

In 1841, due to family losses and debts accumulated since the disaster of the '45 Macdonald of Clanranald parted with his estate of South Uist to the infamous Colonel Gordon of Cluny. By 1851, Gordon was directing a programme of forced emigration under the pretext that the land was overcrowded and therefore unable to support its population. Those who remained were forced to inhabit poorer ground, and the land they had developed over centuries was given over to sheep.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/usbiography/g/emilygordoncathcart.html> [accessed online 22.11.13]

<sup>5</sup> Archibald Menzies, a botanist and naval surgeon, introduced the tree to Britain in 1795. Having been served the seeds of the tree as a dessert while dining with the governor of Chile, he stowed them on board the ship, and returned to England with five healthy plants. [http://apps.kew.org/trees/?page\\_id=136](http://apps.kew.org/trees/?page_id=136) [online accessed 7.10.13]

<sup>6</sup> Goodrich-Freer, A. *ibid.* <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/outer/chapter07.htm> [accessed online 18.11.13]

<sup>7</sup> A. Goodrich-Freer 'Outer Isles' 1902, Chapter V. Miscellaneous Notes on the Islanders <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/outer/index.htm> [accessed online 18.11.13]

In 1881 pleas for help to the Crofters Commission eventually led to 3000 acres being claimed back allowing for the process of toiling and refruiting to begin again. Yet the land never fully recovered because the population had been permanently reduced.

*'The history of the transformation which a great portion of the Highlands and Islands has, during the past century undergone, does not repose on the loose and legendary tales that pass from mouth to mouth; it reads on the solid basis of contemporary records, and, if it were wanting, it is written in indelible characters on the surface of the soil.'*

Report of the Crofters Commission 1885<sup>8</sup>

Phil Lydon and fellow environmental artist Suhee Kang, spent 24 months visiting farms in East Asia and the US for 'Final Straw' their documentary project that studied natural farming methods in order to promote better human connections with the natural world: Phil Lydon recalls

*'It was here that I asked the small-statured smiling farmer, Okitsu san, "Why can't people just understand the idea that nature is something to be cared for, revered, appreciated. Why does no one get it?" Okitsu san's smile turned to a straight, contemplating face. He lifted his head and stared out, as he tends to do, for what seemed like several minutes. Then he corrected my statement. "We do. We all do already. Every time we stand in nature, every time we look up at the sky, or the tree, or the wheat plant, we feel joy in that simple moment, we smile for no apparent reason other than the fact that we are here on this earth. Everyone has these small moments. Everyone gets it. Even if we don't realize it on the surface, we understand it inside ourselves. We just need to cultivate that understanding. And don't you see, the way I cultivate food, it's just my own expression of this understanding".*

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<sup>8</sup> Goodrich-Freer, A. *ibid.*

## Memory, Identity and Landscape – Geographical Perspectives

5-7 May 2016, DCU, Dublin, Republic of Ireland

So why does it seem that do we not understand land and our place in it? Why is it that despite how our bodies are able to perceive and understand we choose to ignore the simple lessons that are inherent in the land itself? The sooner we come to consciously accepting, just like Okitsu san that we are in the midst of existence, not outside of it, the quicker we may progress ways to address current ecological turmoil.

We need to learn to play the game better by listening to our natural intelligence as well as our intellect. The lands of Uist are fields of potential, like many others in the world, that lie for the most part dormant, awaiting endeavour and acts of conscious freedom<sup>9</sup> to turn environments back into thriving, productive communities that can support a sustainable future. Yet it still requires the autonomy of the individual to confidently take up the challenge.

As I climb up Aisgerbheinn, the hill overlooking the island, I am confronted by the distant details of the treeless landscape, and the rhythm and motion of the natural world around me. And I realise that we may learn much from this small green island and the gap of water that separates it from the sea of grey, ungrazed grass<sup>10</sup>.

The little island garden with its collection of distorted and varied specimens reveals two perspectives of thought: on the one hand it is a reminder of colonial dominance and the havoc it created; and on the other hand it presents the bountiful and forgiving lessons that nature teaches about adaptation, assimilation, diversity and symbiosis. Both ultimately present in the here and now.

### Playing the Monument Game

*'All playing is a being-played' Gadamer, Truth and Method (1960)*

As a method to provide an open engagement with the text and images I restructured them into a set of playing cards for use in a card game that would afford a multi-

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<sup>9</sup> Sufficient self awareness to know that you can choose to act outside of society's norm

<sup>10</sup> Ungrazed pasture, overgrown grass that has lost it's nutritional content

## Memory, Identity and Landscape – Geographical Perspectives

5-7 May 2016, DCU, Dublin, Republic of Ireland

layered and ever changing visual/verbal space. Participants are invited to gather at card tables and are issued with a set of Monument Game playing cards and instructions on how to play the game.

### Game Rules:

The goal is to collect books, which are sets of four cards of the same rank i.e. 4s, Kings, Jacks etc., by asking other players for cards you think they may have. Whoever collects most sets wins.

**Players**            3-6 players, but it is possible for 2 to play.

**Deck**                52-card deck (Jokers removed but left on show)

**Setup**                The dealer deals 5 cards to each player (7 each for 2 players). The remaining cards are placed face down to form a stock.

**Gameplay**          The player to dealer's left starts. A turn consists of asking a specific player for a specific rank.

**BUT before you ask for a card you must read out clearly the text on your own card of that rank first.**

### Rules of 'Go Fish'

1. On your turn, decide which player to ask for a specific card rank. For example, I might say: 'Mary, please give me your jacks'. The player who asks must already hold at least one card of the requested rank, so I must hold at least one jack to say this - **BUT before you ask for a card you must read out clearly the text on your own card first.**



## Memory, Identity and Landscape – Geographical Perspectives

5-7 May 2016, DCU, Dublin, Republic of Ireland

2. If the player you ask has any cards of the requested rank, he must give all of his cards of that rank to you. In the example, Mary would have to give you all of her 'jacks'.
3. If you get one or more cards from the player you ask, you get another turn. You may ask any player for any rank you already hold, including the same one you just asked for.
4. If the person you ask has no relevant cards, they say, **"Go fish."** You then draw the top card from the draw pile.
5. If you happen to draw a card of the rank asked for, show it to the other players and you get another turn. However, if you draw a card that's not the rank you asked for, it becomes the next player's turn. You keep the drawn card, whatever rank it is. NOTE: **The "next player" is the one who said, "Go fish."**
6. When you collect a set of four cards of the same rank, show the set to the other players and place the four cards face down beside you.

**Winning**      'Go Fish' continues until either someone has no cards left in their hand or the draw pile runs out. The winner is the player who then has the most books.

The idea to restructure the text was stimulated by Umberto Eco's text *The Poetics of the Open Work*<sup>11</sup>. In this essay he introduced composers and writers who had designed specific works to be played or read in an order that would be determined by the musician or reader thereby creating endless opportunities for the work to be formed, interpreted and experienced resulting in possibilities for engagement that would not otherwise have happened. Presenting a deep map in this way affords a method to engage compelling evidence within its spatio-temporal context, providing a platform for active listening and spatially embedded argument.

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<sup>11</sup> Eco, U. (1989) *The Open Work, The Poetics of the Open Work*, Chap 1 Trans. Cancogni, A. Harvard University Press, Massachusetts

## Memory, Identity and Landscape – Geographical Perspectives

5-7 May 2016, DCU, Dublin, Republic of Ireland

Parameters are provided by rules of the game, expectation of role, and a certain familiarity with the card game format. These boundaries provide sufficient formal structure to frame proceedings and act in counter point to the free association created by experiencing reading and hearing the sounds of the words and flash of the images, as well as the inevitable human compulsion to become competitive.

Put together these elements create a platform for shared experience, dialogue, and physical engagement between the participants that assists reflection on the text through the processes of action, repetition, and meditation, each time a round of cards is played. A relational and durational process that frees up the mind to the possibilities of what has not yet been considered. Mixing modes of knowledge that allows the blending of the intellectual and embodied skills that we use to grow our understanding to be activated, and which are so central to developing a fuller understanding of society and culture. Deep Maps reveal the confluence of actions and evidence that frame discussions, tracing paths of intellectual exploration through a new creative space that is visual, structurally open, multi-media, and multi-layered.

*‘The more a layer of text is interpreted, transformed, taken up anew, stitched back together, replayed, rewoven – each time in a different way – the more likely it is to manifest the truth it contains.’*

Bruno Latour An Inquiry into Modes of Existence<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Latour’s lecture at CRAASH on the history of AIME Project <http://youtu.be/gL3WBHTWDjI>

## Memory, Identity and Landscape – Geographical Perspectives

5-7 May 2016, DCU, Dublin, Republic of Ireland

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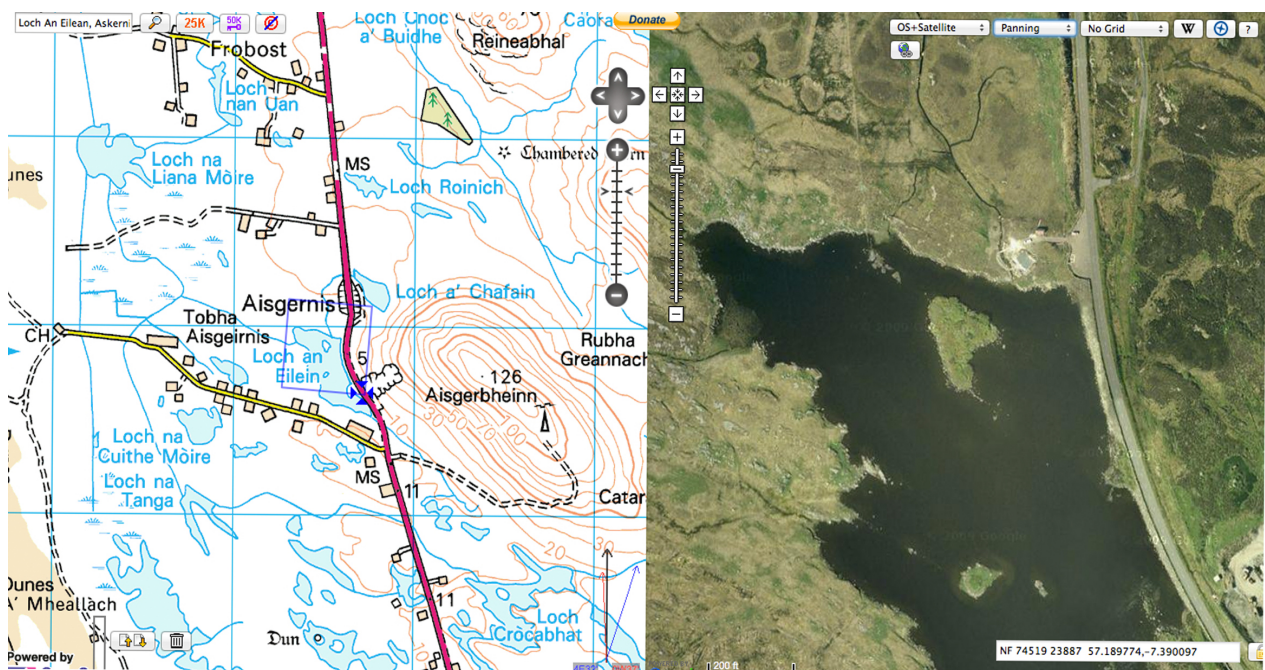
5-7 May 2016, DCU, Dublin, Republic of Ireland

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## Memory, Identity and Landscape – Geographical Perspectives

5-7 May 2016, DCU, Dublin, Republic of Ireland

Research trip 20.05.2012 Askernish Island, South Uist							
Image	Plant Type T = Tree S = Shrub P = Perennial B = Bulb	Scientific Name	Common Name	N = Native I = Introduced	Stage of Growth B = budding FL = full leaf F = flowering	Size in meters (height x spread)	Number of plants
	T	<i>Araucaria araucana</i>	Monkey Puzzle	I	FL	15 x 4	1
	T	<i>Tillia vulgaris</i>	Lime	I	FL	10 x 4	1
	T	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	Common Alder	N	FL	8 x 8	1
	T	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Common Ash	N	B	2 x 8	5
	T	<i>Betula pubescens</i>	Downy Birch	N	FL	10 x 6	8
	T	<i>Ulmus glabra</i>	Wych Elm	N	FL	10 x 4	1
	T	<i>Salix aurita</i>	Eared willow	N	FL	2 x 2	45
	S	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	Honey suckle	N	FL	2 x 2	5
	P	?	Asterlike with yellow flowers	N	FL	0.2 x 0.1	50 approx.
	B	<i>Allium ursinum</i>	Ramsons, Wild garlic	N	F	0.2 x 0.2	1000 approx.
	P	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	Tormentil	N	FL	0.2 x 0.2	100 approx.
	P	<i>Primula vulgaris</i>	Common Primrose	N	F	0.1 x 0.1	1000 approx.
	B	<i>Ranunculus ficaria</i>	Lesser Celandine	N	F	0.1 x 0.1	1000 approx.
	PHerb	<i>Ulmaria filipendula</i>	Meadow sweet	N	FL	1 x 0.5	1000 approx.
	P	<i>Nymphaea alba</i>	White Water lily	N	FL	unknown	unknown
	P	<i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i>	Bog bean	N	F	unknown	unknown

App.2: Research Trip Table 20.05.2012 App. 2



**Memory, Identity and Landscape – Geographical Perspectives**  
5-7 May 2016, DCU, Dublin, Republic of Ireland



App. 3: Map of Loch an Eilean, 1875 <http://www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/record/nls/10110/ordnance-survey-25-inch-mile-inverness-hebrides-sheet-05510/os25inch>